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A  
SEASONABLE  
APOLOGY  
FOR  
RELIGION,

Being the subject of two

SERMONS

Lately delivered in an Auditory in

LONDON.

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By Matthew Pool, Minister of the Gospel in  
London.

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L O N D O N,

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STANDARD

ARTS

RELIGION

GENERAL

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To the Right Honourable and truly  
Religious Lady *Latitia* Countess  
of *Donegal*, &c.

Madam,

**W**Hen I resolv'd to comply with  
the desires of some worthy per-  
sons in the publication of this  
discourse, I was not long in  
suspence about the Dedication, but was speedily  
determined therein, by calling to remembrance a  
former obligation to your Honour, under which  
I had justly put my self; only I feared, lest, in-  
stead of discharging an obligation, I should de-  
serve an imputation of presumption and weak-  
ness, in thinking to dissolve it by such a trifle.  
But, Madam, if I should take the measure of  
my return, from your merit and my duty, per-  
adventure I could not have satisfied justice,  
without a Volume as large as that, which your

## The Dedication.

Honour and many others know, I am engaged in: Besides, I considered the nature of true goodness and generosity, which looks not so much to the nature of the Present, as the sincerity of him that tenders it. And, Madam, though the bulk of the discourse is but small, and my managery of it can add no greatness to it, which I confess is such as needs the pardon of a critical Reader, yet I must aver, that the subject of it is truly great, Religion, which hath the great God, and the great Saviour the Lord Jesus for its object, great promises for its encouragement, great salvation for its reward. And what Galen said of Physick is more true of Religion, non datur exiguum, there is nothing small and trivial in it. And as Religion is great in it self, so I dare say it is in your Honours eyes, and therefore I am persuaded you will not despise this small Apologie for it: which the miscarriages of former times makes necessary, and the degeneration and malignity of the present makes seasonable. But I must remember I am writing an Epistle to a small Discourse, and I must have a care of making my Gate too wide, lest (as he said) the City should run out of it. Your Honours time

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## The Dedication.

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*is too pretious for me to rob you of more of it,  
and my occasions are so urgent that they will  
scarce allow me to perform civilities. I only  
add my own, and beg yours, and other truly re-  
ligious persons Prayers, that God would bless  
my poor endeavours. If your Honours name  
and interest engage others to read it to their  
good, it will abundantly answer the desires and  
compensate the pains of,*

*Madam,*

*Your Honours most obliged, and humble,  
and faithful Servant, especially in  
the concerns of your soul*

*M. P.*

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M. B.

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A  
SEASONABLE  
APOLOGY  
FOR  
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Matthew 11. 19. The last clause of the Verse.  
— *But wisdom is justified of her children.*

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**T**HE Particle *But* commands your reflection upon the foregoing words and verses, wherein our Saviour describes the humours and manners of that generation, which he does two ways,  
1. Allegorically, vers. 16, 17. *But whereunto shall I liken this generation? it is like unto children sitting*  
B in



*in the Markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and you have not danced, We have mourned unto you and you have not lamented.* 2. Properly, *vers* 18, 19. Wherein he represents their perverse and censorious humour. They were so capricious, that God himself could not please them, though he condescended so graciously as to use variety of means and different sorts of persons, to comply even with their humours as far as might be, to become all things to all men, that he might save some. First he sends *John*, neither eating nor drinking: which you are not to understand simply, as if, as they fable of the *Cameleon* he did live upon Air, but the meaning is, he did neither eat nor drink intemperately. He did both restrain himself from unlawful, and moderate himself in lawful, things. For Quantity what he did eat was little, next to nothing, for Quality, it was Locusts and wild Honey; His garments also were as displeasing to others as his meat to himself: and all this was designed by God for this end, that the austerity of *John's* life, join'd with the severity of his doctrine, might awaken that secure generation to repentance, whereby they might divert Gods judgments, and prevent their own ruine. But all was to no purpose, and it produced quite contrary effects, even a censure of his person and doctrine, instead of compliance with them. They say *he hath a Devil*. Man (they considered) was a sociable creature, and because he much avoided converse with men, and chose solitude, they said he has a Devil,

Devil, according to the antient observation, That every solitary person is either a God, or an Angel, or a Devil.

They pretended they could not tell, whether John's doctrine was inspired by God, or suggested by the Devil, and therefore *they rejected the counsel of God, against themselves*, in refusing his Doctrine and Baptism. When this proves ineffectual, God contrives another way, and sends an Ambassadour in another garb. *vers. 19. The son of man came eating and drinking, i. e. freely conversing with other men, even the meanest and the worst of them, Publicans and Sinners, accomodating himself to the customs and companies of men as far as might be, but this also succeeds as ill as the former attempt; they are still striking upon the same string, and venting their censorious humour. They say, Behold a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber, a friend of Publicans and Sinners.* His gentleness to Sinners they call approbation of their sins, his conversable disposition, looseness and luxury; Thus far you have their censure. My Text contains our Saviours *intemperate* or judgment upon the whole, *But wisdom is justified of her children.* In which words three things need explication.

*Quest. 1.* What is meant by wisdom?

*Ans.* In Scripture use, as sin is oft called folly, so Religion or the fear of God is called wisdom. *Job. 28. 28. The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, that is understanding.* Wisdom and goodness in Scripture language are but two expressions signifying the same thing. *Psal. 36. 3.*

He hath left off to be wise and to do good, where the last words expound the former: More particularly wisdom in this place is that which the generality of the Jews rejected, and that was Christ, (who is called *Wisdom*, Prov. 8. and who is made unto us of God *wisdom*, and in whom are all the treasures of *wisdom*) and the wise and holy counsel of God concerning mans salvation through Christ. This is that which they rejected, and the children of wisdom justified.

*Quest.* 2. Who are the children of Wisdom?

*Answ.* The true Disciples of Wisdom. It is a phrase of the Hebrew language, whereby men devoted or addicted to any person or thing, are called his, or its children. Thus those that addicted themselves to propheticall studies, are called *the sons of the Prophets*. 2 Kings 4. 38. Thus the friends and associates of the Bridegroom are called *children of the Bride chamber*, Mat. 9. 15. And the same phrase we meet with in profane Authors. Students in Physick are called by *Lucian* *ιατρῶν παῖδες*, *Children of Physicians*. And Students in Philosophy are called *the children of the Philosophers*. So here, *the children of Wisdom* are the approvers and lovers of Wisdom or Religion; The sincere worshippers of God, those that heartily embrace the ways of God, that are his servants devoted to his fear, and particularly those that approve of Christ, and embrace his doctrine and ways.

*Quest.* 3. What is meant by being justified?

*Answ.* It is a juridical term. To be justified is to be acquitted and approved; for you must consider that

that Wisdom or Religion was here brought before the Tribunal of audacious men, and they pass a sentence of condemnation upon it, unto which the present justification is opposed. So then the sum of the Text, with respect to the Context is this. First here is Religion condemned by evil men, though upon very slender grounds and gross mistakes, and perverse constructions. Secondly here is Religion justified, vindicated and approved of by good and wise men, *But wisdom is justified by her children*, and accordingly there are two doctrines that hence offer themselves to your thoughts; the first implied, the second expressed.

First, *That ungodly men are very apt to speak evil of Religion and religious persons upon the most trivial pretences.* Doctrine. 1.

Secondly, *As it is the duty of all, so it is the practice of those that are wise and good, to justify Religion, notwithstanding all the miscarriages of its friends, and censures of its enemies.* Doctrine. 2.

Of these in order.

First, *Ungodly men are very apt to speak evil of Religion, and its professors, upon the weakest and most trivial pretences.*

The rise of the Doctrine you see is evident; the Jews condemned both John and Christ, and their several methods and doctrines, and that (as you have heard) upon most frivolous motives. This hath always been one of the many ill qualities that are in wicked men, that they have an aking tooth at Religion, and religious men, a great pronity to seek and spy faults in them.

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When there was a strife between the Herdsmen of Abram's Cattle, and the Herdsmen of Lot's Cattle, *Gen. 13. 7.* It is mentioned as a memorable circumstance, that *the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the Land.* Abram well knew what an evil eye those men had upon Religion, and how ready they would be to censure the actions of those that owned it; and therefore he condescends to Lot, though his Junior and his Nephew, and offers him his choice in a writ of partition, *vers. 8, 9.* And Abram said unto Lot, *let there be no strife I pray thee between me and thee, &c. for we be brethren: is not the whole Land before thee, separate thy self I pray thee from me, if thou wilt take the left hand, I will go to the right, or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.*

The Jews were the only people that professed true Religion in the World, and there was no people more maligned and dispised; no Religion more censured than theirs; no calumnies were thought foul enough to be fastned upon them: They were said to worship the Clouds, to worship an Asses head, and what not? and when the Jews degenerated, and their Religion was either corrupted or antiquated, and Christians came in their stead; they succeeded also into their hatred, and were (as the Apostle speaks) in vulgar account *as the scum and off-scouring of all things.* *Acts 28. 22.* *As concerning this sect, we know that it is every where spoken against.*

And thus it hath been in all succeeding ages, and therefore it is no wonder if it be so at this day. I must  
acknow-



acknowledge with grief of heart, that pretenders to Religion have given too great occasion to its enemies to open their mouths against it, and it is my earnest prayer, that God would forgive the sins of English professors; the sad effects whereof we feel at this day, and in nothing more than in this, that for their sakes Religion is dishonoured and despised. But yet I must add, that whatsoever have been the pretended or real miscarriages of Religious men, Religion is innocent, and has not deserved any of that contempt or reproach which is cast upon it. And therefore this will not justify the practice of ungodly men, whereby they are so apt to censure Religion, and its professors, upon the most vain and trivial pretences. In the prosecution of this doctrine, I shall proceed in this method. 1. Give you some demonstrations of the truth of the point. 2. The Grounds and reasons of it, and 3. apply it to our own use.

First, I shall give you some demonstrations or indications of this malevolent temper of wicked men, and of their perverse and unreasonable censures of Religion and those that profess it.

First, They condemn that in Religious men which God commands. For example. God commands men not only to mind their own salvation, but their Neighbours too. It is a speech befitting none but a barbarous Cain. *Am I my Brothers Keeper?* It is our duty as occasion is offered, and need requires, to admonish our brethren of their sin and danger, to prevent their damnation, and to further their salvation.

vation by all means possible. Scripture is exprefs and peremptory, *Leviticus 19. 17. Thou shalt not hate thy Brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy Neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.* And certainly, if I must help up my Neighbours As when he hath sunk down under the weight of his burthen, or help him out when he is fallen into a Pit; much more is it my duty to help my Neighbours Soul, when it is ready to drop into the pit from which there is no redemption. Nay the very light of Nature teaches men this doctrine. Remarkable to this purpose is that passage of *Socrates*, as *Plato* reports it in his apologie for him, who tells his Judges; that *if they would spare his life upon this condition, that he should forbear instructing, and reprovng the young men of the City, he would not accept his life upon such dishonourable terms.* But now, if a Christian makes conscience, and seriously sets himself to the practice of this duty, if he does admonish, and warn, and reprove his Neighbour when he sins against God, and wrongs his own Soul, how severely is he censured for it; then he is a morose and unconvertible person, a busie body, a troublesome and intolerable Neighbour. Then Religion makes men peevish, ill-natured, imperious, and all that's hateful.

An eminent instance of this we have *Genesis 19.* where *Lot* endeavours to diswade the *Sodomites* from executing their intended wickedness, *vers. 7, 8. I pray you brethren do not so wickedly, behold now I have two daughters which have not known man, let me I pray you bring them out unto you, and do you to them*

as is good in your eyes, only unto these men do nothing, for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof. Where (abating the error of offering his Daughters to prostitution) there is so great a constellation of virtues as might command reverence from the most savage Barbarians; so strict an observance of the Laws of Hospitality, such fortitude and generosity in exposing himself to the utmost hazards, for the defence of those whom he supposed to be helpless strangers, such Heroical self denial in being more willing to receive the injury in a part, and the fruit, of his own body, than to permit it to strangers, such eminent charity in affording counsel to these wretched Miscreants, and doing what he could to prevent the death of those that deserv'd not to live; and the reproof too, was managed with all sweetness and mildness, *I pray you Brethren*, and fortified with great strength of reason and arguments, *do not so wickedly*, as if he had said, This action has a turpitude in it self, and will bring some mischief upon your heads: and yet these virulent Adders, turn a deaf ear to the counsels of this holy charmer though he charmeth so wisely. *vers. 9. And they said, stand back, and they said again, this one fellow came in to sojourn and he will needs be a judge. Now will we deal worse with thee than with them.* Thus heartily did they censure and threaten him for no other crime but this, that he did his duty, and obeyed Gods command, and would have made them as happy as himself. So it is a plain command of God, that Christians should *walk circumspectly*, *Ephes. 5. 15.* *anp88's exactly*, *warily, precisely*, for so the word signifies. That they

## A Seasonable Apology

walk according to rule, *Gal. 6. 16. As many as walk according to this rule, peace be unto them, and mercy. That they have a respect unto all Gods commands: and hate every false way. Psalm 119. 128.* and consequently that they make conscience of every, yea the least duty, and of avoiding the least sin, that they abstain from all appearance of evil. *1 Thes. 5. 22.* Now if a Christian really be this, which he ought and pretends to be, and do this which you see he stands obliged to do, 'tis incredible what clamours are raised against him. If a man make conscience of remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy, and of abstaining from the doing of his own ways and pleasure, and the speaking of his own words, as is expressly commanded, *Isaiah 58. 13.* (unless perhaps the Advocates of prophaneness will fetch relief from the Tents of Heresie, and say, that the Old Testament is antiquated to Christians) then he is a Præcisian, suppers, superstitious, nay he's a Jew, and I must acknowledge, 'tis better be a Jew than such a Pagan Christian, as to live in the gross violation of the known laws of that God whom he professes to serve and obey. Thus if a man will not do all that his neighbours do; if a man make a scruple of those actions and carriages which others can easily digest, and are generally esteemed but puny sins, then he is nice, singular, fantastical, though it be no more than God requires he should be.

Secondly, They condemn religious men for those very things which their own consciences approve of: for mens consciences if they be not bribed, are generally on Gods side. For example. Conscience will

will justifie, that a man should *strive to enter in at the straight gate*, and make Religion his work and end, to which all other things should give place. So as neither worldly business, nor idle visits, nor recreations should divert a man from it. Conscience will justifie, that a man should be governed by Religion in all his concernments, that *whether he eats or drinks, or whatsoever he doth, all should be done to the glory of God*, as we are expressly enjoined. 1 Cor. 10. 31. That a man should prefer the hearing of a Sermon, before an unnecessary worldly occasion, or the performance of a civility, I had almost said before a dearly beloved Play. This I say is no more than Conscience will justifie: and 'tis a case already determined by our Saviour, *Luke 10. 41, 42*. But if a man will resolutely and diligently set upon the practice of these things, he shall certainly hear of it. This is but pride, to be thought better than his neighbours; humour, to do more than other men; hypocrisie, to make great shews of devotion; design, to cover some evil practices; or at best but an intemperate and busie zeal.

I knew two persons of Quality that were censuring some of their near Relations, and condoling one with another, that they could have no more comfort in them: They were so frequently in their Closets, or at Sermons, and Fasts, &c. that they could have no society with them: but at last Conscience began to work, and one of them said, but the truth is, Sir, they do no more than you and I ought to do. And believe it, however men may stupifie their consciences now, there will be a great



number of that mind at the last day.

Thirdly, They condemn Religion for the faults of irreligious men, or such as are vain pretenders to Religion: For such the World has ever had, and 'tis reasonable to expect it, especially if Religion happen to be in fashion, and the way to preferment. And a multitude of such persons there were in the late times, that have since discovered of what complexion their Religion was, being of forward pretenders to it, grown implacable haters and persecutors of it; and these were the men that contributed as much to our late sad and sinful enormities as any; and now Religion must bear the blame. All these mens brats must be laid at Religions door; and Religion must needs be the cause of Sedition and Rebellion, and what not? More wise and just was that late Noble Lord, who though a constant enemy to all, either the real, or supposed, miscarriages of late times, yet has left this passage upon record in his pious Letter, *That though Religion had been abused to very bad purposes, it was not to be thought worse of, for it.* A great sign of a truly honest mind and heart, and the contrary speeches of other men do plainly discover a heart full of malevolence and ill-will to Religion. We know the Devil sometimes transforms himself into an Angel of Light, now it were as just to charge all the lies and wicked actions of the Devil acting in such a disguise upon all the holy Angels, as it is to charge the faults of meer pretenders to Religion, upon the sincere professors of it.

Fourthly, They condemn Religion for the faults of humane nature. If any person that professes Religion

Religion be morose or passionate, if any of them be churlish Husbands, perverse Wives, slothful or heedless Servants, Religion must suffer for it, and you shall hear such language as this, this is Religion, these are your religious persons. It must be granted that such persons do very wickedly; to give occasion to the adversaries of Religion to open their mouths against it. They shall pay dear for exposing Religion in this manner: that should teach them to conquer themselves, and to subject their own inclinations to the commands of God, and the credit of the Gospel: yet still, I say, Religion is not the worse for it. It is an unjust and an ungodly thing to charge the faults of nature upon grace. What was said of *Galba's* wit, may frequently be said of the grace of God planted in the Soul, that it doth *malè habitare*, that it is lodged in an incommodious and ill tempered body; Religion will not alter the constitution of the body; it will not expel choler or melancholy, or correct any of those ill humours that are connatural to it. The Heathen *Seneca Epist. II.* might teach these men more candor, while he saith, *Nulla sapientiâ naturalia animi vitia ponuntur: quicquid infixum & ingentum est, lenitur arte, non vincitur.* No wisdom will wholly subdue the natural infirmities of the mind: whatsoever is rooted in us, and born with us, it may be qualified by art and industry, but it can never be conquered or extinguished.

Fifthly, They condemn that highly in religious men, which they allow or bear with in themselves or others. Herein appears their gross partiality, they;

they can see the moles in their eyes, and cannot discern the beams in their own: and this I commend to your observation upon this sort of men, you will find those who are most forward to accuse Religion and Religious men upon every small occasion, most ready to excuse ungodly men for far greater crimes: their drunkenness is but good nature and sociableness; their horrid murders, especially if ushered in with the solemnity of a Duel, are but acts of Valour and Gallantry; their dismal oaths, able to make the pillars of Hell to tremble, are but the effects of sudden passion, for which, good men, they are very sorry afterwards. In a word, All their sins are but infirmities, and all the sins of Gods people are rebellion and witchcraft; and as some have said in a particular instance, the very unpardonable sin. Thus if *David* do but once fall into the sin of Adultery, the enemies of God will take occasion to blaspheme him. *2 Sam. 12. 14.* Ay, This is the *man after Gods own heart*, This is the man that *keeps himself from his own iniquity*, This is he that *bath respect to all Gods commandments, and hates every false way*. Other Kings of his and the succeeding times committed the same sin a hundred times, but you hear no noise of that. In them it was but a venial sin, a humane frailty, or the just Prerogative of Princes. Hence it comes to pass, that those who are really sorry for some of the miscarriages of their Brethren in iniquity, do heartily rejoice and triumph in the slips and falls of religious Men, while a generous and vertuous soul would on the contrary say

say, Tell it not in Gath; publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon.

Secondly, I shall make a little enquiry into the causes of this malignity, whereby wicked men are so prone to speak evil upon Religion and Religious persons on all occasions. I shall only mention five.

First Ignorance. However many of these men esteem themselves the wits of the Age; herein they betray great ignorance and folly, or (which is worse,) desperate malice; but in charity we will suppose the best, it is their ignorance. Therefore they impute all evil effects to Religion, because they have not wit to understand the true causes or differences of things, nor to consider, that in good men there are diverse and contrary principles, from each of which those actions may proceed. *'Tis true, Plebs non distinguit, The Rabble make no distinction.* But if these men had the wisdom wherein they pretend to excel others, it would teach them to discern between things that differ; to ascribe every effect to its proper cause; and to distinguish between those actions which proceed from the frame of the soul; and those that flow from the temper of the body; between those that arise from Religion, and those which are the fruits of that imperfection which attends upon Religion in this life. And because these men can no better distinguish, it is a plain evidence, either that they have malicious hearts, or else but vulgar heads.

Secondly Hatred of God and Religion. Peradventure some may say, there are no such Monsters in the

the world that hate God, and that I do but traduce the nature of man in making such a supposition. But if I am deceived, God hath deceived me. For amongst the other crimes which the spirit of God hath branded the *Romans* with, this is one, that they were *haters of God*, *Rom. 1. 3.* And God saith *he will repay them that hate him to their face. Dent. 7. 10.* And if the experience of former ages hath left this doubtful, I think that of this generation will put it out of all question. Since men have now arrived to that height of impudence, (*Caligula* like) to proclaim war against God himself. Hence come those audacious and Atheistical discourses and Books which have dared to appear in the face of the Sun in this generation, as if they would beat God out of the Field, and dispute him out of the world. There are some men whose principal business it is to affront God, and to do as much mischief to Religion as possibly they can. I have been credibly informed concerning a Person of some Quality, who perceiving his friend to scruple an action which he perswaded him to, said to this effect, *I suppose you are not willing to do this, because you think it unlawful, and I therefore would do it.* So that I think by this time 'tis past doubt, that there are such prodigies in humane nature, that have a radical hatred against God and Religion; and no wonder if such a cause produces such an effect; and hatred of Religion makes them forward to censure it. *For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth will speak.* Men are generally ready to excuse the actions of those that they love, and to accuse and censure



sure the actions of those whom they hate, and to take all they say or do in the worst part.

Thirdly, Revenge against Religion and Religious men; they owe them both a spite. Religion condemns them to unspeakable Torments, to the *Worm that never dyes, the Fire that shall never be quenched*. It tells them in plain terms, that *the wicked shall be turned into Hell*, that *there is no peace to the wicked*, that *if they live after the flesh they shall dye*, and that if they hope to escape eternal death upon other terms, they do but cheat themselves. Religious men also condemn them; and as *the saints shall judge the World* at the last day, so do they now. 'Tis said of *Noah*, that by that eminent act of Faith, the building of the Ark, *he condemned the unbelieving world*. Heb. 11. 7. This was the matter of *Cain's* contest with his Brother, and the reason why he slew him, *Because his own deeds were evil and his Brothers righteous*. 1 John 3. 12. *Abel's* example condemned him; and so doth the example of good men in all ages condemn the ungodly of their several generations. Wicked men, especially the ingenious part of them, have many fine devices to paliate their sins with; it is their nature or temper, and that is immutable: their temptations are invincible: *Flesh and Blood can never forbear in such circumstances, or endure such severities*. Now when men talk at this extravagant rate, as if the serious practice of godliness were absolutely impossible, Behold (say God and Conscience) thy self confuted by these instances. They do spend as much time and pains in the service of God, as is necessary

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for

for thee to do; they subdue those inclinations which thou pretendest to be invincible; they actually overcome the temptations, which thou sayst are irresistible, and why canst not thou do so? Ay this is the ground of the quarrel, therefore these men must be reproached, and Religion must be traduced, that so Revenge may be satisfied.

Fourthly, Self defence, and the maintenance of their Lusts; they love their Lusts, and therefore dislike Religion, because it makes opposition against them. As some fond Parents disgust those persons that tell them of their Childrens faults. Sinners are passionately desirous, and stiffly resolved to go on in sin without control or disturbance, which they are most likely to meet with from Religion, and Religious men. *These* will be always reproving and warning them, and *that* will be forbidding and threatening them. So that in their own defence, or rather in the defence of their Lusts, they are driven to an enmity against them both. They must disparage that yoke which they will not put on, and condemn Religion, that they may justify themselves in their contempt and rejection of it. They must hate and vilifie Religious persons, as the Malefactor doth his Judge. An eminent instance of this we have in *Ahab*, 1 Kings 22. 8. where, being asked by *Jehoshaphat*, *If there was not there a Prophet of the Lord*, He answers, *There is one Micaiah, the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the Lord*, (he grants him to be a true Prophet of the Lord *Jehovah*, and yet adds) *but I hate him, for he doth not prophesie good concerning me, but evil.* *Micaiah* would stop him in his career; he

he would not have had him go to *Ramoth-gilead* to the slaughter. He was indeed a better friend to *Ahab*, than *Ahab* was to himself, and this was the reason of his hatred against him.

Fifthly, Love to Calumny. The *Athenian* Orator being to defend himself from the accusation of his adversary, premised, that he was to speak to them with great disadvantage, because men did generally love to hear accusations rather than apologies, of which many accounts may be given. Envy at the virtues of others; pride to find others worse than themselves: the patronage they gain thereby to their own errors, by finding others as guilty as themselves, and so they make an escape in the croud. And all these considerations, are more urgent against Religious men, as those that shine with the greatest lustre; and therefore calumnies against them must needs be most grateful.

Here is ground for an Apology for Religion, notwithstanding all the miscarriages, of pretenders to it, or professors of it, which it must be confessed, (and I think there are few truly good and ingenuous persons that will deny it) have been in the late times grievous and scandalous, and God grant us all, and especially those that have been most culpable, true repentance for them, that they may remember that tremendous *woe* denounced by our Saviour against those by whom offences come. I do not here plead for any of these things. Blame Persons, and condemn Facts as much as you please, only for your own sakes take heed of condemning the Righteous with the Wicked. But as for Religion, what has

that done? this I affirm, that Religion is not responsible for, or chargeable with any of these things; nor is there any reason, why men should think or speak worse of Religion, or truly Religious men upon this occasion. It is held unjust, and unreasonable to charge the faults of any particular person upon all the rest of his profession, to charge the fraudulent and dilatory practices of one Lawyer upon all the persons of that Robe; or the errors and follies of every impertinent Quack, upon the whole College of Physitians: and why should Religion have harder measure than other professions have? Nay on the contrary, there's great reason it should have better, because of that reverence we all owe to God, because of the sublimity and difficulty of those things wherein Religion is concerned, in which therefore mistakes are more easie, and because of the great importance of Religion, where mistakes and misapplications are more dangerous. I do not now desire your favour, but demand your justice for Religion, and this I do again aver, that the miscarriages of some, yea many Religious men, do not afford a solid argument against Religion, and that for three reasons.

First, Because all Religious men are not involved in the guilt of them. There have been in all ages, and so there were, and are in this, some Religious men, that did and do, sigh and mourn, for those publick abominations which they cannot, or could not help. Now as you must take heed of *justifying the wicked*, so must you also of *condemning the righteous*. So then all Religious men are not liable to this

this charge, and yet if they were, Religion is not concerned in it, and that because

Secondly, Religious men are subject to mistakes, and corrupt inclinations as well as other men. It was said of *Elias*, that *he was a man subject to like passions as other men were*, and by reason hereof, a truly good man, may sometimes turn aside to crooked paths; but this is not to be imputed to Religion, no more than ill manners are to be charged upon good Laws. Nay, indeed these are the effects of Irreligion, or of the imperfect state of Religion in this life. If a Physician prescribes an excellent method of cure, and the Patient observes some of the directions, and neglect others, and the cure be incomplete; this is no blemish to the Physician or his Art, but the blame intirely rests upon the Patients head. Religion gives us excellent rules for the conduct of our lives unto perfection and happiness; but if men do not walk according to these rules, we may say with the Apostle, *Let God be true, and every man a Lyar*. Let every man, whether Religious or Irreligious, bear his own burthen, but why should Religion suffer for mens extravagancies? This is all that can be said, Religion does not make Men Angels, infallible in their judgments, immutable in their goodness: and is no Physician to be prized but he who cures all diseases?

Thirdly, Religion hath washt her hands from all the guilt of mens miscarriages. In all Courts or Councils, those that enter their protests against unrighteous sentences are held innocent. Now Religion hath entered its protest against all the disorders of its Disciples; Religion has bound its yoke upon

upon all of them. What if some Religious men be  
 seditious or rebellious against Magistrates, Religion  
 hath protested against it, *Rom. 13. 1. Let every Soul*  
*be subject to the higher powers,* and if men forget their  
 duty, Religion commands to *put them in mind to be*  
*subject to principalities and powers, to obey Magistrates.*  
*Tit. 3. 1.* If persons professing godliness be perverse  
 or stubborn Servants, Religion hath declared a-  
 gainst it. *Servants be subject to your Masters with all*  
*fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the fro-*  
*ward. 1 Pet. 2. 18.* And the like obligation Reli-  
 gion hath laid upon every relation: *Husbands must*  
*love their Wives, as Christ loved his Church, Ephes. 5.*  
*25. And Wives must be in subjection to their own Hus-*  
*bands.* At their peril be it, if they will dare to  
 violate these sacred injunctions, but if they do,  
 yet there is no reason Religion should bear the  
 blame: that hath laid its commands upon all its fol-  
 lowers, to carry themselves in every relation and  
 condition with all care and sweetness. It allows  
 no mans unrighteous, churlish, morose, un-neigh-  
 bourly deportment. But *whatsoever things are true,*  
*whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are*  
*just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are*  
*lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there*  
*be any virtue, and if there be any praise, we must*  
*think of these things. Philip. 4. 8.* It commands that  
 every one that names the name of Christ, should depart  
 from iniquity, *2 Tim. 2. 19.* and charges Christians,  
 as they tender its honour, to take heed to their a-  
 ctions. *Let as many Servants as are under the yoke*  
*of Christ, count their own Masters worthy of all honour,*  
*that*



that the name of God and his Doctrine be not blasphemed. 1 Tim 6. 1. Religion disowns and disclaims those pretenders that act contrary to these rules, yea and hath commanded us to disown them too. Now we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw your selves from every brother that walketh disorderly, 2 Thes. 3. 6. I have written to you, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicatour, or covetous, or an Idolatour, or a railer, or a drunkard, with such an one, no not to eat. 1 Cor. 5. 11. It forbids all irregularities, under the highest penalties: Neither fornicatours, nor Idolaters, nor adulterers, &c. shall inherit the Kingdom of God, nay, it severely punisheth all obliquities. Christ hath ordained a strict discipline, which if it were faithfully executed, would effectually purge out all those persons, for whose sakes Religion suffers. There are also spiritual, and most tremendous punishments, which Religion doth inflict upon unsound professors, by giving them up to a reprobate mind, and seared conscience, to damnable heresie and apostasie from Religion, to Atheism and Popery, of which we have frequent instances; Religion thus purging out its ill humours, and abandoning its rotten members, of whom we may say as St. John does, 1 Ep. John. 2. 19. *They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us.* In a word, Religion doth more to secure the world from all manner of injustice and wickedness than any thing else whatsoever. For it both binds the righteous laws of men, upon the Conscience with the authority of God, and it threatens

threatens the violators of them with severer punishments than Magistrates can inflict: so that if Religion doth not restrain men, nothing will. 'Tis sufficient that Religion hath don its part, and therefore ought in all reason and justice to be excused. I cannot but observe the gross unrighteousness of men, that for some few late instances of Rebellion or Sedition amongst professors, take occasion to condemn Religion, whereas if they look into the Histories of other Nations, or of former ages in this, they shall find twenty instances to one of the same sins in persons that never made any shew of Religion. Nor hath Religion only given excellent rules to oblige Subjects to obedience to their Rulers, and a patient suffering under them, but also there have been divers remarkable instances of Christians practising this rule, and quietly submitting to those penalties which probably by force they might have avoided, and therefore it is a cleer evidence of mens malignant disposition against Religion, that they take occasion to condemn it from the ill examples of some, rather than to commend it from the good examples of others, as the laws of Civility and Charity oblige them to do.

U/c. 2.

Caution or instruction.

First, To the enemies of Religion.

Secondly, To its Friends.

Thirdly, To all.

First, To the enemies of Religion. Take heed of this sinful practice of speaking evil of Religion for any mens pretended or real miscarriages. We live in times wherein mens mouths are open against Religion;

Religion; they are not contented to condemn the actions of Religious men, but from thence both weakly and wickedly infer that all Religion is but a cheat and imposture, and men are very apt to drink in such cursed suggestions, and to follow such pernicious examples. This therefore I caution you against. Whoever thou art that dost so, consider

First, Herein thou art the Devils friend, thou dost his work and mayst expect his wages; Religion is Gods great Instrument to dissolve the works of the Devil; and no wonder if he labours to disparage it and make it ineffectual. Whoever is the engine, you may be sure the hand of *Joab* is in this matter, and 'tis he that sets men upon this work: hereby he hardens men against God, and exasperates God against men. For be assured of it, God is very tender of the honour of Religion, and he that toucheth that, toucheth the apple of his eye.

Secondly, Herein thou art thy own enemy; when thou openest thy mouth against Religion upon any pretence whatsoever: I may say, as *Solomon* did concerning *Adonish*, *As the Lord lives thou speakest this against thine own head.* Possibly some professors of Religion have given thee occasion, and thou art glad of it; as wicked men usually are both at the sins and sufferings of Gods people, though none have less cause for it. *Mat. 18. 7. Woe to the world because of offences.* The blame of the offence will rest upon the head of him that is the cause of it, but the mischief of it redounds to the wicked world, and most of all to them that take the greatest pleasure in it. Their laughter is but like that of one in a phrensey

an indication of his disease, and a presage of his death. Consider I beseech you, if ever you come to Heaven, you must love Religion, and imitate the lives of Religious persons. High and honourable thoughts of Religion are the first entrance into a state of conversion and salvation; so long as a man hath Religion in contempt, he is far from the Kingdom of God.

Secondly, Caution to the friends and professors of Religion.

First, Abuse not this Doctrine to carelessness. Peradventure some may reason thus, Because ungodly men are forward to speak evil of Religion without cause, therefore it matters not how they carry themselves towards them; whether they please or offend them. But this is a dangerous mistake, they will take occasion, but you must not give it, but rather follow the Apostles pattern. 2 Cor. 11. 12. *What I do that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them that desire occasion.* Religion commands you not only to please God, but others as far as you may. Rom. 15. 2. *Let every one of us please his neighbour, for his good to edification.* Religion doth not only forbid to offend God, but men, 1 Cor. 10. 32. *Give none offence, neither to the Jew, nor to Gentiles, nor to the Church of God.* It requires your special care and circumspection towards strangers or enemies. Col. 4. 5. *Walk in wisdom towards them that are without:* and there is great reason for it, *that the name of God and his Doctrine be not blasphemed.* 1 Tim. 6. 1. This was the ground of David's pious resolution. Psal. 39. 1. *I said I will take heed to my*

*my ways: that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth as with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.*

Secondly, Learn hence to live above the censures of evil men: be not discouraged in, or driven from any of the ways of God by all their reproaches and calumnies: you have seen you must not necessarily give them offence; now you see you must not beruled and guided by their offence. In short, you must neither regard their offence too little, nor too much. The rule is this, In things indifferent, you must be a Willow, and not an Oak, do what lies in your power to comply with them, to please and win them, but in matters of evident duty, you must be an Oak, and not a Willow, as Luther expresses it. You must follow the example of our Blessed Saviour, who when he was told that the Pharisees were offended at his Doctrine, he passeth it by with contempt, and this answer, *Every plant which my Heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, they shall both fall into the Ditch. Mat. 15. 13, 14.* From whence Divines have drawn this conclusion, that the scandal of proud Pharisees is to be neglected. If once it comes to this dilemma, that a man must offend God or Men, he need not take day to consider, it is easie to tell which to choose.

Thirdly, Learn hence to maintain the honour of Religion. If wicked mens mouths be open against it, let not your mouths be shut, but open, for the

defence of it. Take heed of that no less dangerous, than common, sin of being ashamed of Religion; remembering that severe, but righteous, sentence of our Saviours, *Whoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.* Mark 8.38. and Mat. 12.30. He that is not with me, is against me: and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad. It is a part of the Prophets charge against the Jews, that they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth: Jer. 9.3. Wicked men are not ashamed to wear the Devils Livery, and why should you be ashamed to wear Gods? I beseech you content not your selves with owning Religion in your hearts, Christ as he deserves, so he expects, your mouths and tongues also, Rom. 10.9. *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart thou shalt be saved.* Thus David was not satisfied with having the word of God hid in his heart, but saith, *I will speak of thy testimonies before Kings, and will not be ashamed,* Psal. 119.46. and (which makes the argument more forcible) the Kings of his time were Pagans, both strangers and open enemies to Religion.

Fourthly, Carry your selves so circumspectly, that you may give no advantage to the enemies of Religion, that you may stop the mouth of calumny, so the Apostle counsels us, 1 Pet. 3. 16. *Having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ, and again, 1 Pet. 2. 15.*

For



For so is the will of God, that with well doing you put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. Take heed especially of those practices, which open the mouths of ungodly men against Religion; particularly these.

I. Avoid all affected and unnecessary singularity in words, gestures, habits, &c. There is one kind of singularity you must always maintain, viz. the singularity of a holy life, Eph. 4. 17. *This I say therefore, and testifie, in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk:* and Exod. 23. 2. *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.* Noah's singularity is mentioned to his honour, *Thee (only) have I seen righteous before me in this Generation:* and Lot's singularity, whereby he differed from the rest of the Sodomites, is remembered to his praise in both Testaments. Nay the very Heathen Seneca justifieth this singularity, in his Discourse *De Constantia sapientis*, *Non respicit sapiens quid homines turpe judicent aut miserum; non ita quia populus; sed ut sidera contrarium mundo iter intendunt, ita hic adversus opinionem omnium vadit*, that is, *A wise or good man doth not regard what men judge dishonourable or miserable; he does not go in the common road, but as the course of the Stars is contrary to that of the lower world; so he acts contrary to the opinion and practice of the generality of men.* Worse therefore than Heathens are they who dare open their mouths against this singularity, and call it preciseness, or peevishness or humour, &c. which indeed, coming from such mouths, are rather titles of honour, than imputations of disgrace. But the singularity that I warn you against, is that which

which lies in little things, in the affectation of words, phrases, tones, gestures, &c. against which the same *Seneca* speaks pertinently and excellently, *Ep. 5. Intus omnia sunt dissimilia, foris nostra populo conveniat, id agamus ut meliorem vitam sequamur quam vulgus, non ut contrariam; alioqui quot emendare volumus fugamus. Temperetur vita inter bonos mores & publicos, suspiciant omnes vitam nostram, sed & agnoscant. Let our inside be as unlike the people as may be, and our outside as like to them; let this be our care, that our course of living be better than theirs, but not contrary, lest otherwise we drive away those whom we would reclaim. Let us steer our course between that conversation which is best, and that which is most in use. Let our manner of life be such that they may reverence it, but yet such also that they may understand it. I cannot therefore approve of any uncooth gestures or tones, or other affected singularities in any Christian, and least of all in Ministers; yet thus much I must say, there is no reason why men should despise the Ordinances of God for such circumstantial and trivial indecencies, or refuse their food, because it is not served up in a Lordly Dish. Nor should it be thought strange or unreasonable, if such as have an inward passion for Religion, discover it in their outward man, by some unusual significations. I must not dissemble, I cannot but esteem it another token of mens malevolence against Religion, that they can dispense with these very things, or more indecent postures, from persons transported with love or any other passion, which they so severely censure in persons that are fir'd with zeal*

for

for God and for the good of souls; and because they have no sense of these things in themselves, they conclude there is none in others also, and judge all to be but hypocritical fiction; but although such Censurers are never the better, yet I wish I could prevail with all serious Ministers and Christians to watch against such things, to strive with their own temper, and to redeem themselves from such ill habits and customs, which some peradventure have contracted. I would entreat you to consider, that, 1. Religion doth not oblige you to them; that *consists not in meats and drinks, and phrases and gestures; but in righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.* 2. Religion obligeth you against them, the great command of the Gospel is, *Let all things be done to edification;* and we must according to the Apostles practice, *1 Cor. 9. 22. become all things to all men, if by any means we may save some.* And let me add, what Christians haply do not sufficiently consider; that they ought to have a more special care of those whom they are too apt to despise, I mean of ungodly men, (whom such affectations do fill with prejudice against Religion) as the Physicians chief care lies towards those that are most diseased. And forasmuch as the conversion of sinners is a more noble and necessary work than the edification of Saints, Christians should in this, as in all other parts and kinds of conversation, so demean themselves, as they may not prejudice any against, but rather win them to the love and ways of God.

2. Take heed of injustice, fraud, or falseness in  
your

your words, trades, and actions. This is that which opens the mouths of men wide against Religion, and wo to them that give the occasion, but let such vain pretenders to Religion know, that godliness is nothing worth which is not attended with righteousness, and the grace of God, wheresoever it is in truth, will teach a man to live soberly and righteously as well as godly in the world. All that are truly good will not only make conscience of serving God, but will also provide things honest in the sight of men, Rom. 12. 17. So 1 Cor. 6. 9. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God; that is, are you so ignorant of the principles of the Oracles of God, as not to understand so plain and important a truth? The Rules of the Gospel are clear, 1 Thes. 4. 6. *That no man go beyond or defraud his Brother in any matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such.* There is a vulgar reproach, Professors of Religion will not swear, but they will lye loudly. Will they so? then set a mark upon them. That man that will lye or cheat, or falsifie his word, and allow himself in the usual practice of these things, let him know, and let others take notice of it, his Religion is in vain, nor is Religion concerned in his miscarriages. In the meantime you see what necessity there lies upon all that fear God, to avoid such wicked practices.

13. Take heed of scandalous sins; you must indeed make conscience of avoiding all sin, it being the character of every truly good man to be the same in secret, where none but God sees, that he is before the whole world. But in especial manner you must take heed of notorious sins; for hereby God is publicly

publickly dishonoured, and the souls of others infinitely wounded, and Religion highly disgrac'd. He that is not deeply affected with these considerations, I may say, hath not one dram of true Religion in him.

4. Take heed of relative sins, 'tis a great honour to Religion, when those that profess it carry themselves well in all their Relations, when religious persons are the best Husbands, the best Wives, the best Masters, the best Servants, and let me add, the best Neighbours and Friends. For do not think Religion doth either require you or allow you to be unneighbourly or unfociable. 'Tis true there needs caution in this matter, that a man do not partake of the sins of others, that he doth not maintain intimate or unnecessary familiarity with grossly vicious persons, but, in other cases, Religion commands courtesie and kindness, *be pitiful, be courteous, 1 Pet. 3. 8.* Unspeakable is the hurt which that silly Sect among us do in this respect, by making the world believe, that Religion teaches them ill manners.

5. Take heed of pride and passion. I join them together, because they usually go together, *only by pride cometh contention, Prov. 13. 10.* These sins are odious in all men, but especially in persons professing godliness, because it directly contradicts the great command and example of their Lord and Saviour, *Learn of me for I am meek and lowly.*

6. Take heed of indiscreet zeal, without due respect to persons, or places, or things; hereby many men have done great mischief to Religion, even when they have design'd the advantage of it; we

are commanded to *be wise as Serpents*, as well as *innocent as Doves*; and Christians have great need to pray to God for wisdom, not only for their own safe conduct to eternal life, but also for the prevention of these dishonours which they may bring upon Religion by their follies and imprudences.

3. Caution to all. I beseech you do Religion, and your selves that right, not to judge of it by the censures and calumnies of evil minded men; remember though they shall answer for their wickedness, you shall not go free; if by their false suggestions you be induced to any contempt or dislike of Religion, you shall assuredly perish, and your blood will be upon your own head. *If the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the Ditch.* Consider also you have been forewarn'd of this mistake, and your own reason must needs allow this inference, that if Religion be not to be valued by the lives of good men (because they come unspeakably short of the Rules and Precepts of it) much less is it to be measured by the slanders of wicked men. There are three just exceptions against the testimony of ungodly men against Religion.

1. They are ignorant. How witty or learned soever they be in other matters, they are deeply ignorant of the concerns of Religion, and therefore *speak evil of that which they understand not.* They say there is no such thing in the world as Religion, that it is nothing but fancy, or passion, or imposture and design; and they may in part think so, because indeed they know nothing of the reality of Religion, as one said, whose profession should have taught him



him better things, he knew no regeneration, but when a man turned from a Jew or a Heathen to believe in Christ; Religion is not to be known, but by an inward sense and tast. *Tast and see that the Lord is good, Psal. 34. 8. If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, 1 Pet. 2. 3.* It is therefore no wonder, if ungodly men represent Religion to themselves and others as phantastical, burthensom, and slavish, because they see only the outside of it, which is the uncomly and troublesom part of it, but are profoundly ignorant of the inside of it, in which the beauty and pleasure of it consists. The inward work and aTINGS of grace in the soul, acquaintance and communion with God in Christ, the consolations of the Holy Spirit, joy and peace in believing, triumphant hopes of eternal glory, these things to them are a *Terra incognita*, an undiscovered part of the world; or rather a meer *Utopia* or Fiction. Now what prudent man will venture his salvation upon the report of such unlearned and unexperienced persons in these matters? by the same reason, by which I am obliged to believe the best Artists in their several professions, I am also obliged to reject and slight the testimony of illiterate Novices, such as these are in the affairs of Religion.

2. They are interessed persons. They are brib'd against Religion, not only by the censures of others, and by the common cry (which easily carries away such unstable souls) but also by their own lusts. Religion hath an enemy in every mans breast, every sinful desire and inclination which a man hath, designs nothing less than the extirpation of Religion,

which is the only thing it dreads, and therefore hates, according to the known Maxim. Now what man in his wits will run so great a hazard, as the loss of an immortal soul and an eternal life, upon the testimony of interelld persons? *Perit judicium cum res transit in affectum, That mans opinion is little worth, which is byassed by his interest and affections.*

3. They are enemies and malicious persons; they owe Religion a spite, and their hearts are full of malice against it, as I have already proved by divers instances. I do not say they hate Religion, for it self, but they hate it upon other grounds, partly out of envy at that lustre which they cannot attain, partly out of revenge against their Judge, and principally out of love to their sinful lusts; but whatever is the cause the effect is evident, they hate God and are enemies to Religion, as any prudent man will easily discern; and therefore their testimony hath no weight nor force in it against Religion. Religion is not to be evil thought of, either because of the miscarriages of its friends, or the censures of its enemies, which leads me to the second Doctrine, *viz.*

As it is the duty of all, so it is the practice of those that are wise and good, to justify Religion, notwithstanding all the miscarriages of its friends, and censures of its enemies.

The subject of this Proposition is the justification of Religion. What that phrase implies hath in part been told before, and will hereafter be more fully explained: At present this may suffice, as God  
justifieth

justifieth a sinner when he absolves him from all the guilt of his former sins, and from all the censures and accusations of the Devil and his own conscience, and holds him for innocent; so do we justify Religion, when we acquit it from all the censures and imputations of ungodly and unworthy men against it, when we heartily approve of it, when we think and speak honourably of it upon all occasions, when we credit and adorn it by our actions. This justification of Religion, notwithstanding the miscarriages of its friends, and censures of its enemies, 1. Is the duty of all. No men are more deeply obliged to the practice of this duty, than they that least perform it, than the maligners and censurers of Religion: because Religion is the only Physick and cure for a lost soul, which none need more than such undone and desperate creatures. This is one of the first steps to salvation; it is most certain, till a man justifie Religion, he will never love it, nor chuse it, nor give up himself entirely to it: the Scribe who did approve of Religion and an holy life, our Saviour said of him, *thou art not far from the Kingdom of God, Mark 12. 34.* And on the contrary, *salvation is far from the wicked, saith the Psalmist, Psal. 119. 155. because they seek not thy Statutes:* and they that do not justifie and approve of Gods Statutes will never seek them.

2. It is the practice of those that are wise and good; and that,

1. Because they are wise; their wisdom enables them to distinguish aright. 'Tis the folly of ungodly men, that they can not distinguish; and hence  
it.

it comes to pass that they charge the faults of men upon Religion, and impute the miscarriages of hypocritical Professors to serious Christians. But true wisdom teaches men to distinguish (1.) between persons and persons, between pretenders and sincere Christians. I would not countenance that fond conceit of some who pretend to a spirit of discerning in this sense, that they can distinguish between hypocrites and sincere persons, as Saint Peter could discern the false-heartedness of *Simon Magus*, *Acts* 8. 23. *For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.* For neither are these men *Peters* successors, nor did *Peter* (for any thing that appears from the Text) perceive it any other way, than by observing the effects of a naughty heart, and judging of the Tree by the Fruit; which we also may do, and those that are wise can do. They can in some good measure see through the varnish and pretence of hypocritical Professors, and therefore they seldom or never charge the misdemeanours of such persons upon those that are truly religious.

2. Their wisdom helps them to distinguish between persons and things, betwixt Religion and the Professors of it; and hence they avoid that Rock which wicked men generally stumble at, they do not impute the faults of men to Religion. What is good in men they ascribe to Religion, that hath the honour of it, as in reason it should: what is evil in men they charge upon themselves and their own corruption, where the shame of it ought wholly to rest.

3. Their

3. Their wisdom helps them to distinguish between things and things, between error and error, sin and sin, and so they avoid the vulgar error of the Enemies of Religion; unto whom every mistake of a Professor of Religion is a fundamental heresie, every distemper the Plague, and every infirmity is the unpardonable sin; whereby they do at once betray both deep ignorance and desperate malice: but wise men distinguish, they allow for the infirmities both of humane nature, and of the Christian state in this life (as in reason they ought, and as the great God himself is pleased to do) and therefore they neither so highly censure the slips of Professors, as others do, nor dare they charge any of them upon Religion.

2. They justify Religion because they are good, and therefore judge justly and impartially of it, and that is sufficient. Religion begs no mans vote, it courts no mans favour, but only demands justice, and requires a fair tryal by equal Judges, which good men are. They are not bribed and biassed by prejudice, lust, or interest, and therefore can discern the truth of things, and consequently the beauty of Religion.

- In the farther prosecution of this Doctrine, I shall endeavour to show,

1. Why we should justify Religion.

2. How we should justify it: and

3. Apply it.

For the first, I shall enforce the practice of this duty by these reasons.

I. We should therefore justify Religion, because  
God

God justifies it. It is safe being on Gods side, and let me be bold to affirm, that supposing a man did find some difficulties in Religion which he could not resolve and conquer, yet he ought to submit to Gods wisdom, by an implicate faith to believe what God saith, and by a blind obedience to do what God requires, though he see no reason for it. For this is a respect which we usually pay to persons eminent for wisdom and goodness; that we do not easily suspect or condemn their actions, though seemingly strange, but rather put a favourable construction upon them, justly concluding, that they see some reason for their actions, which we do not apprehend. But here we have occasion to renew the old complaint concerning mans perverseness towards God. *Multos erga homines equos reperies, erga Deum verò neminem.* We shall meet with many persons that pass an equitable judgment upon the actions of men, that judge harshly and unrighteously concerning the ways of God. Now God justifies Religion,

1. By his Word. The justification of Religion is the great scope and design of the Holy Scripture; there is not a line in it but hath some plain tendency that way; and all the miracles which are recorded in Scripture (a great number whereof are also acknowledged by Heathen Authors) are so many unquestionable evidences that God doth, and that we should, justify Religion.

2. By his works. For although God doth not think fit to turn miracles into our daily bread, nor immediately to punish every impudent Malefactor (whom he reserves to sorer punishments, and whom  
he



he never punisheth more dreadfully than when he doth forbear to punish them) yet he hath not left himself, nor Religion, without witness in divers Ages of the world, nor in our Age neither. *The wrath of God hath been revealed from Heaven against the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men.* God hath at sundry times and in divers manners, immediately and extraordinarily, pleaded the cause of Religion, sometimes by the miraculous preservations and deliverances of his people in extremity of danger and misery; sometimes by a stupendious discovery and remarkable punishment of the closest crimes of ungodly men; as it hath been the observation of all Ages concerning Murthers, and many other Villanies, of which innumerable instances might be given, and confirmed by most considerable and concurrent testimonies, which he that shall deny, cannot, without great folly and arrogance, expect to be believed himself in any thing he affirmeth.

2. Because the greatest Enemies of Religion are and have been, and will be, forc't to justify it: multitudes of Persecutors in the Primitive times, when they considered the holy lives, the constant and chearful sufferings of the Christians, did cry out, *Great is the God of the Christians*, and many were converted upon that occasion. Ungodly men are frequently compelled by the light of their own consciences, and by the irresistible evidence of things, to commend those holy and righteous ways of God, in which they will not walk. It is true, wicked men are generally mad, and therefore it is said of the Prodigal, when he was converted, that *he came to himself*,

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Luke

*Luke 15. 17.* implying that till that time he had been besides himself. Take a wicked man in the heat of his youth and lust, and you had as good meet a Bear robb'd of her Whelps, and you may as soon pacifie the one as the other. Then he acts more like a brute than a man, not only against the rules of Religion, but against all the sentiments of reason, and honour, and interest: He sacrificeth all to a base and sordid lust: and in these circumstances who will value his judgment? but when the mad fit is over, when he recovers the use of his reason and conscience, then you shall hear him justify Religion and condemn himself. When age and experience hath made him wise, when sickness and the approach of death makes him serious and impartial, then he changeth his note, and those things which were gain to him, he now accounts loss, those lusts which he formerly doted upon, and used to chew under his tongue like a sweet morsel, to think of with great delight, he now abhors the very remembrance of; those good men whom he before despised, he now embraceth, that Religion which he trampled under his feet as foolish and contemptible, he now applauds as the only wisdom, and wisheth in vain, that it had been his choice and portion. An instance whereof we have, *Prov. 5. 11, 12, 13.* *And (left) thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, how have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof, and have not obeyed the voice of my Teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me.* It hath been observed by some of the Heathens, that the soul, when it is nigh its departure

departure out of the body, is more wise and apprehensive than it was before. Thus much is certain, that then prejudice, humour, and deceit vanish, and things appear in their true and proper shape, then men are in earnest, and they judge impartially, and then it is that they justify Religion. And this hath not only been the practice of weak and foolish men (as some ignorantly object) but of as great Wits and deep Statesmen as the world hath had, that have then bewailed their contempt of Religion; and giving the deceitful world precedence before it.

3. You should justify Religion because the Devil opposeth it. It is most apparent from the experience of this, and all former Ages, that Religion is the object of the Devils rage and malice; his great design is to stop the course of it, to keep men from the love and practice of it. To this end he raiseth calumnies and persecutions, and fills the minds of men with prejudices against it, and tempts religious men to sin that they may dishonour it. The Devil carries himself quietly towards ungodly men, complies with their inclinations, presents convenient objects and occasions to them, gives them all furtherance in their evil designs; but when any man begins seriously to think of Religion, then the Devil bestirs himself, sometimes roaring like a Lion, sometimes deceiving like a Serpent; then he stirs up friends to flatter and seduce, enemies to threaten and rage, others to slander and reproach. And wherefore is all this? What doth this teach us? even that which is said concerning Nero, that must needs be some excellent thing which so envious and malicious

a spirit so fiercely opposeth. In brief thus, mans interest and the Devils are directly opposite, and therefore you may safely conclude, whatsoever promotes his interest destroys yours. He heartily grudgeth to man his restoration to that happiness which himself hath irrecoverably lost, and therefore he sets himself against Religion, which he knows to be the only restorative to lost man; the only way to deliver him from the Devils power, and from wrath to come, and to instate him in the possession of true and endless bliss.

4. You will never repent of the justification of Religion, once justifie Religion and you will never condemn it. Ungodly men are changelings in Religion; their Religion varies with their humour, and with the season; they have one Religion in the time of youth and jollity, another in the time of old age and trouble; one Religion when the man rules in them, another when the beast gets the upper hand; so that the whole employment of the poor sinner is all his days to do and undo, to build with one hand, and to pull down with another, to erect in health, and demolish in sickness. How full the world is of sick-bed repentances is commonly observed, how true they are, is another question; but 'tis sufficient for my purpose, that sinners are then clearly convinc'd, then they condemn themselves, and their former ways, and caution their friends and brethren in iniquity. 'Tis seldom or never seen that they dare stand to their former bargain at that time: But he that justifieth Religion once, will justifie it for ever. The judgment of a good man is steady and  
fixt,

fixt, as his practice is regular and constant; he justifieth Religion in prosperity, and he doth no less in adversity, when he suffers with it, yea though he suffer by it. He justifieth it in health, -and, you may be sure, he doth so in sickness too. I dare challenge the experience of all persons, did you ever hear a man in his wits upon a dying Bed complain that he had been too religious, or condemn himself, that he had slighted the concerns of the present world in comparison of it? I trow not. No, then Religion appears with the most beautiful face, then a man finds unexpressible sweetness and satisfaction in it; then a smile of Gods face is more worth than a thousand worlds; when a man can say with good Hezekiah, *Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart. Esa. 38. 21.* or with Saint Paul, *I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand; I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of righteousness, 2 Tim. 4. 6, 7, 8.* Nay a religious man carries his principles along with him into another world. He that justifieth Religion now, will justify it at the day of judgment, and for ever; then he will rejoice in, and bless God for directing him to his former choice; when the miserable sinner shall make a formal recantation of all his hard speeches and bitter reflections upon Religion and its Professors, and will say (as 'tis represented in that Apocryphal Book called the wisdom of Solomon, Ch 5.) *This was he whom we had sometimes in derision and a Proverb of reproach, we fools accounted his life madness, and his*

his end to be without honour, how is he numbred among the children of God, and his lot is among the Saints, we wearied our selves in the way of wickedness and destruction; yea we have gone through Desarts where there lay no way. But as for the way of the Lord we have not known it. What hath pride profited us? or what good hath riches with our vaunting brought us? &c.

5. Religion is highly justified by the sad effects of irreligion in the world. This is an argument not consisting of empty words, but deduced from the nature of things. 'Tis most true, *Carendo magis quam fruendo sentiuntur bona*, The excellency of things is better understood by the want, than by the enjoyment of them. The darkness and sad effects of the night, commend to us the use and excellency of the Sun and day light; consider with me, I beseech you, the doleful estate of this degenerate Age and Nation. How are men (not by Poetical fiction, but too truly) transformed into Swine, and Goats, and Serpents, and Tygers; nay, in truth, I wrong the Beasts by the comparison; men are much the worse bruits of the two, they far outdo them in filthiness, deceit, perfidiousness, fierceness, and rage. Whence is it that men do so waste their consciences with hideous crimes, blast their reputations, and render themselves the scorn of all serious and prudent men, fill their bodies with loathsome diseases, reduce their estates to a morsel of bread? Is it not for want of Religion; which, where it is observed, is an effectual fence to all these? Whence is that Proverb verified, that One man is a Wolf, a Devil to another,

but



but for want of Religion to controll their unmanly, unchristian, unruly passions; look into many Families, whence are all the breaches, contentions, and divisions there? whence is it that Husbands and Wives are so false, so unnatural and unkind one to another? and that notwithstanding the manifest command of God to the contrary, and the Oath and sacred Tye which God hath bound upon them, which their own expresse consent hath made indissoluble but by death, that they do so easily, so unnecessarily, and so frequently separate one from another? Whence is it that Children are so stubborn and rebellious, that Servants are so froward, unfaithful, and negligent, but because they want Religion to teach and enforce their several duties? Whence are the disorders in Kingdoms, that Superiours do not rule well, that inferiours do not obey well, that all do not live in mutual love and amity? What is the true cause of tumults and sedition? Not Religion, as is falsely pretended, but irreligion; witness *Jam. 4. 1. From whence come wars and fightings amongst you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?* Which it is the great business of Religion to mortifie. Methinks I hear the cries of thousands whose irreligion hath consumed their Estates, and shortned their days, and hurry'd them before their time into another world, crying out, as they say was written upon *Sennacherib's Tomb, in his day, in the year, Look to me and learn to be godly.* Wicked men in Scripture are compared to the Horse and the Mule that have no understanding, whose mouths must be held with a Bit or Bridle, *Psal. 32. 9.* This Bridle is Religion,  
and

and when you see these Horses in humane shape, run furiously away, breaking through all Hedges of restraints, venturing upon precipices, prancing in the midst of highest dangers, it is an evidence that the Horse hath cast his Bridle or his Rider. This was *Abrahams* inference, *Gen. 20. 11. I thought surely the fear of God is not in this place, and they will slay me for my Wifes sake.* And as much may be gathered from *Nehem. 5. 13. But so did not I* (that is as precedent Governours did, oppress and grind the people) *because of the fear of God.* Nay the very common form of legal Inditements against notorious Offenders do evince this, being ushered in with this Preface, *not having the fear of God before their eyes.* I must acknowledge I am very apt to believe, that one principal reason why God suffers such abominable wickednesses, and mischiefs consequent upon them, to break forth is, that it might be a divine *ductio ad absurdum*, that by the dismal effects of irreligion, the worst of men might be forc't to see the excellency and necessity of Religion.

6. If you do not justify Religion, the Heathens will condemn you. Who although they did not understand the doctrinal mysteries of Religion, yet they have in a great measure justified the practice of it. Yea there are divers practices of religious men, which our Christian Heathens censure and deride, which those more sober Heathens have approved and commended. To give two or three instances. If any man among us hold fast the truth, and resolutely persist in virtuous and pious actions, notwithstanding all the reproaches, losses, and suffer-

sufferings, which he may meet with. If any man will quit his part in *Paris* for that in *Paradise* (as one said) our modern Heathens make such a man the object of their mirth and scorn. So did not the wise Heathens: *In ea (i.e. honeste) autem persequenda, omnes cruciatus corporis, omnia pericula mortis atque exilii parvi sunt ducenda*, was the speech of *Cicero pro Archia Poeta*, i. e. In the prosecution of virtuous actions, a man should lightly esteem all the tortures of the body, and the utmost perils of death or exile. So *Seneca Ep. 66. Ad omne pulchrum vir bonus sine cunctatione procurrit: stet licet carnifex, stet tortor, atque ignis, perseverabit, nec quid passurus, sed quid facturum sit, adspiciet, & se honestæ rei tanquam bono viro credet.* A good man will make haste to the execution of any good purpose, though the executioner be at hand, with all the instruments of torture, yet he will persevere, and not so much consider, what he shall suffer, as what he should do, and will trust himself with a good cause, as with a virtuous and generous friend. Again, if any Christian make Religion his great business, and command all his other concerns or occasions to stoop to it, and govern all his worldly affairs by it; such a one in the new style of the Heathens of the last Edition is but a grave Fop, he becomes the Song of the Drunkards, the sport of the Wits, (as they tell us they are) or, more truly, the scorn of Fools. The same Heathen *Seneca* would teach these Creatures more wit and Religion, *Non cum vacaveris philosophandum est, omnia alia negligenda ut huic assideamus.* You are not only to give up your selves to the study and practice of virtue, when

you have nothing else to do, but all other things are (comparatively) to be neglected, that you may entirely devote your selves to this. And elsewhere he gives this invincible reason for it: *si ager esses, curam intermississes rei familiaris, & forensia tibi negotia excidissent; toto animo id ageres ut à morbo liberareris. Quid ergo? non & nunc idem facies? omnia impedimenta dimitte, & vaca bonæ menti; nemo ad illam venit occupatus. Exercet Philosophia regnum suum, dat tempus, non accipit, &c.* If you were dangerously sick, you would cast off the care of your domestic concerns, and publick employments, you would make this your whole business to get your selves rid of your disease. And why then do you not now set upon the same course; cast away all impediments, and consecrate your selves to virtue? No man is fit to entertain so noble a guest, that is not fully at leisure for her. Virtue wherever it resides will govern, nor doth it receive Laws but give them. It is not content to take that time which is left to it, by secular affairs, diversions, and recreations, but makes such allowances of time to these as it judgeth meet. Arrian tells us, that it was not only the opinion of the Jews, but also of the wise Egyptians and Romans, *ὅτι τὸ θείον πνεῦμα προσηκουμένη ἐστὶν παντί προσάκουσιν.* That virtue and piety is to be preferred before all things whatsoever, and that it is in all times and things to be pursued with our utmost strength. 'Tis no great matter if our barbarians be of another opinion. Again, If any Professor of Religion makes conscience of redeeming his time, and dare not prodigally cast away that precious jewel (the true worth whereof will never be thoroughly understood,

stood, 'till we come into that eternal state of happiness or misery, which is the result of the good or ill management of it) in vain and impertinent things as others do, he is presently condemn'd, as nice, supercilious, and uncivil. The wise and learned Heathens were of another opinion; it was the complaint of one of them, *Nemo ullam auferat nobis diem, nihil dignum tanto impendio redditurus, sibi ipsi animus hæreat, se colat, nihil alieni agat*, i.e. Let no man rob us of a day, because he cannot give a valuable recompense for so great a loss: let us employ our time in the cultivation of our minds, and let us not spend it in frivolous and impertinent things. And elsewhere he complains, *Magna vita pars elabatur male agentibus, maxima nihil agentibus, tota aliud agentibus*. A great part of our lives is spent in doing ill, more in doing nothing, and most of all in doing things to little or no purpose. I could easily mention many more particulars, but by these you may judge of the rest; and from hence let me leave this conclusion in your minds, that the enemies and deriders of serious godliness, do not only oppose the humours and fancies of some weak Christians (as they falsely suppose) but do indeed confront all the wisdom of former Ages, and the concurring votes of the most learned Philosophers.

2. What is it to justify Religion, or how must a man justify it?

*Ans.* This duty hath a reference,

1. To mens thoughts and opinions; we must justify Religion by maintaining high and honourable thoughts of it; in particular it implies, that a man

should sincerely esteem Religion to be,

1. The wisest choice and best bargain: So did *Job* 28. 28. *Unto man he said the fear of the Lord that is wisdom, and to depart from evil that is understanding.* So did the wisest among meer mortals, *Prov.* 3. 15. *She is more precious than Rubies and all the things thou canst desire, are not to be compared with her;* consequently he will not think it a stoical Paradox, that the good man is the only wise man, and all others are Fools, especially those that think they are least such. When a man looks upon serious Christians as Fops and Fools, he doth not justifie Religion, but he justifies irreligion, and condemns himself.

2. As the justest Law. 'Tis very true, some of the Precepts of Religion are hard in themselves, and seem harder to them that never did accustom themselves to bear this yoke; when God gives Laws to mens thoughts and inward affections, restrains their senses, and bridles their tongues, when he commands them to hate and forsake Father and Mother, Wife and Children, estate and life for his sake and the Gospels, they think these are hard sayings, and none can bear them; and upon this account they condemn the Laws of their Lord and Maker, and quarrel with Religion, and vent their rage against God himself: but good men are of another and better mind, they justifie all the commands of God, howsoever repugnant to their own wills and appetites, or destructive to all their worldly interests. So did *David*, *Psal.* 119. 128. *I esteem all thy Precepts concerning all things to be right.* And so did Saint Paul



*Paul* when he was under the same temptation as other men, when his corrupt inclination led him one way, and the Law and Spirit of God pull'd him another way, and he was like one torn asunder by wild Horses, yet he justifies the Law of God, and condemns himself, *Rom. 7. 7. What shall we say then, is the Law sin? God forbid. Nay I had not known sin but by the Law. v. 12. Wherefore the Law is holy, and the Commandment is holy and just and good. 14. For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.*

3. As the chief felicity. A good man looks not upon Religion as a burthen which he must be forc't to endure, but as a privilege which it is his happiness to enjoy. There is nothing in the world which he more passionately desires, than that he could live exactly according to the excellent Precepts of Religion, (so that he desires death it self for this end, that he may live in perfect and constant exercise of all virtues and graces) there is nothing that he more heedfully and industriously pursues, nothing the want whereof doth more afflict and torment him; the holy Ordinances and Exercises of Religion (which to an ungodly man are tedious, dry, unsavoury things) to a good man are very pleasant and satisfactory. A day spent in the Courts and Service of God, he prefers before a thousand employed in Balls, or Plays, or any other of the toys and trifles of humane life, *Job. 23. 12. I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.*

2. This duty of justifying Religion relates to the tongue or discourse, in these particulars.

1. You

1. You must not censure or condemn Religion, upon any pretence whatsoever: It concerns you to be very cautious and modest in your censures of religious persons, that you make not harsh conclusions concerning their state, nor uncharitable constructions of their actions, remembering that *with what judgment you judge you shall be judged, and with what measure you mete it shall be measured to you again*: but above all take heed of speaking ill of Religion, which is directly contrary to the present duty.

2. You must not partake with others in that vulgar sin of censuring and scoffing at Religion. You may be very guilty of this sin, though you never speak a word against it. If you freely and familiarly and unnecessarily converse with those whose throats are an open Sepulchre, always belching out impure steams against heaven and against God; if you consent to them, connive at, or any ways approve of them. For as the Roman Orator saith, *Quid interest inter suasorem facti & probatorem, aut quid refert utrum voluerim fieri an gaudeam factum?* What difference is there between him that persuades another to an evil action before it be done, and him that approves of, or pleaseth himself with it afterward?

3. You must not give occasion to wicked men to speak against Religion, for though no such occasion will warrant or excuse them, yet it will involve you in the guilt of their sin; you know the woe belongs to him that gives the offence, as well as to him that makes ill use of it.

4. You must when occasion requires be ready to vindicate Religion when it is traduced: when wicked

wicked men have their mouths open against God and Religion, you ought not to have yours shut, as I said before: You have the advantage of the better cause, you serve a better Master, and shall have better wages, and if they do the one out of choice, much more should you do the other, which is your duty. Mistake not, I do not say this is the duty of all persons in all times and companies: God hath made this a duty (for there is a sinful silence as well as a sinful speech) but Christian prudence must direct the time and manner of it, and other circumstances. In some cases you know God hath given us an exemption, *Prov. 9. 8. Reprove not a scorner lest he hate thee. Mat. 7. 6. Give not that which is holy unto Dogs, neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rent you.* Certainly this if any other duty doth require great prudence and understanding in the management of it, an indiscreet defence of Religion, by an ignorant but well meaning Christian, doth oft times more disparage and prejudice it, than another mans reproaches against it.

3. This duty relates to the actions.

1. You must justify Religion by the practice of all the principles and duties of Religion. This is the true and the principal way to justify Religion, and to stop the mouths of all ignorant and malicious cavillers against it. This is the way to maintain the honour of God, *Mat. 5. 16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.* This is the way to adorn the Doctrine of the Gospel, and to win others

others to the love and practice of it: without this all your talk for Religion is but empty and insignificant.

2. You must in a special manner mind those duties and graces which make Religion most amiable among men; such as veracity in all your words, fidelity to your promises and obligations, exact justice in all your dealings, meekness and humility, publick spiritedness and charity, and in one word, whatsoever things are lovely and of good report. On the contrary you must carefully avoid not only those things which are apparently evil and scandalous, but such also as are of ill report amongst the generality of sober and wise men. Some things may peradventure be lawful for another man, that may not be so to a Professor of Religion, because of the greater influence of his example, and the special concern that Religion hath in all his actions.

*Use.*

This may serve for the justification of Religion, notwithstanding all the miscarriages of the Professors of it, and all the censures of enemies to it. There is no reason either of these should beget in you any dislike of Religion.

1. Not the former.

1. Because it is unreasonable to judge of the ways of God by the practices of men. Religion is the way of God, the way which he prescribes, yea the way wherein himself walks, it is the off-spring of the holy God, and therefore must needs be like him, pure and undefiled, and can no more be polluted (to speak properly) by the actions of men, than the Sun beam by the dunghill on which it shines. As the  
holy

holy God doth act in the sinful actions of men, yet is not at all infected with the guilt or filth of them. So Religion, though it be in the sinner, doth not at all partake of the blame or dishonour of his sins.

2. It is unreasonable to judge of the rule (which Religion is) by the actions of those who swerve from the rule. Yet this hard measure wicked men mete to Religion: they do not only debase and disparage it by judging of the rule by the example, but (which is worse) they judge of the best rule by the worst examples, and not by the best, as they ought in reason to do.

2. Not the latter. Because their opinions or judgments are not to be valued, and that

1. Because they are self condemned, and self contradicting persons. Ungodly men (as I told you before) are of one opinion in health and prosperity, of another in sickness and calamity; yea sometimes of one opinion in the day and in company, of another in solitude and in the darkness of the night, and this quite invalidates their testimony. *Testis contraria dicens fidem non facit*, (say the Lawyers) *that witness that contradicts himself is not to be believed*. Moreover, as the judgments of wicked men are oft times contrary to themselves, so their censures are frequently contrary to their judgments: They oft times revile that person with their tongues, whom they reverence in their hearts; and their mouths censure those actions which their consciences justify.

2. They are men of corrupt minds, *Tit. 1. 15. Unto them that are defiled and unbelieving nothing is*  
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pure

pure, but even their mind and conscience is defiled. It is said of the Romans, ch. 1. 28. *God gave them up to a reprobate mind, ἀδοκίμησεν, an injudicious mind, a mind that hath lost its taste and relish, that is unable to discern between things that differ. Two things are necessary as to corporeal, so to intellectual, Vision, 1. Ability in the faculty. 2. Conveniency in the mean, as that the air be clear, &c. But here is neither. 1. There is a defect and impotency in the faculty; there is a natural blindness in mens minds, not done away but by regeneration, 1 Cor. 2. 14. The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.*

2. There is a defect in the mean. The Devil casts a mist and fog before their eyes; *The God of this world hath blinded their minds, 2 Cor. 4. 4.* For any man to be moved by the opinions of such persons, is to appeal to blind men concerning Colours.

3. They are full of deep prejudices against Religion, by reason whereof they neither can see the beauty of it, nor will acknowledge it. We are all born with prejudices against Religion; that natural corruption, which we bring into the world with us, doth put a plain byass upon our minds against it: Every lust is a powerful Gratour against it: Every sinful action leaves in the soul, as a greater inclination to sin, so a greater aversion from Religion. And these prejudices are exceedingly heightened, especially in this degenerate Age, by the infelicity of bad education, and by the contagion of evil example; so that if Religion decline the Tribunal of such persons, your own consciences must



must tell you there is reason for it. If *Aristotle* would not admit young and vicious men to be the hearers of moral Philosophy, much less are they fit to be made judges of Religion. But I cannot content my self with speaking of this in general, give me leave therefore for the farther justification of Religion, and the invitation of sinners to the practice and love of it, to mention and remove some of those prejudices, by which they are scared or withheld from the entertainment of it. I shall confine my self to four, and so conclude.

1. The unreasonableness and incredibility of the principles of Religion.

2. The insuperable difficulty of the practice of Religion.

3. Differences among Professors of Religion.

4. The fewness and meanness, as also the folly and weakness of true Christians.

1. The unreasonableness and incredibility of the principles of Religion; wherein many things are confessedly hard to be understood, and harder to be believed. It speaks (say they) of a God that no man ever saw, of eternal rewards and punishments, which none ever experienc'd, of the resurrection of the body, and other things, which the deepest reason cannot comprehend.

1. *Ans<sup>r</sup>.* This objection riseth from a vain and proud conceit of a mans own reason. A little humility or modesty would soon discover the vanity of this argument; you must not think that you have got the Monopoly of all the wit and learning in the world; you cannot resolve all your doubts in Re-

ligion, possibly others of more clear and uncorrupt minds, of more learning and experience can, and to these (if you were in your wits) you would address your selves for resolution in a matter of such deep concernment. 'Tis a notable passage of the Lord Bacons, *A little Philosophy will make a man an Atheist, a great deal will make him a good Christian.* And the reason is evident, because a smattering in Learning will raise objections, which only a solid understanding of it can answer. Thou complaineest thou canst not resolve thy doubts; 'tis likely thou didst never use the means to resolve them: thou shouldest seriously and frequently consider things in thy own mind, thou shouldest consult the choicest Books, and converse with the wisest, and learnedest, and best of men. Thou shouldest humbly study the Mind and Word of God, for 'tis *the humble that God will teach his way, Ps. 25. 9. God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble, Jam. 4. 6.* Thou shouldest fervently and constantly pray to God for resolution, thou shouldest practise what thou dost know, if thou wouldest learn what thou dost not. *Joh 7. 17. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God.* It is very likely the generality of these Objectors are guilty of the gross neglect of some or all these means, and therefore it is intolerable arrogance and folly to conclude, that because thou in the neglect of all these means canst not resolve these things, therefore no man in the world who diligently useth all is able to do it.

3. Consider the confessed darkness and shortness of.

of mens reasons even in lower things. It hath been the complaint of all Ages, that *truth lay hid as it were in a deep pit*, which our eyes could not reach. One of the wisest of men confest *he knew nothing*, and divers went higher, and this was their position, *Nilil scitur, nothing can be known*. There is nothing but conjecture and opinion in the world. How many difficulties are there in Nature, which the greatest Philosophers to this day are not able to resolve? How many depths in Policy, which put the wisest Statesmen to a *nonplus*? and therefore what wonder is it if there be some insuperable difficulties in so sublime a knowledge as Religion, that treats of infinite eternal and incomprehensible things. Nay reason it self will allow, that there should be some things in Religion above it.

3. Consider the unreasonableness of irreligion. Suppose there be some insoluble difficulties in the principles of Religion, what shall a man do? shall he throw off the sense of all Religion, and the belief of a Deity, and settle in down right Atheism? This I confess is too common an inference. But if Religion be the disease, and this the remedy, I am sure the remedy is worse than the disease. One may justly wonder at the impudence of these men that object the incredibilities of Religion, when the wit of man cannot devise more incredible things than those which Atheistical and irreligious men do swallow. To give but one instance, that a dull heap of senseless matter should of it self produce this goodly Fabrick of the higher and the lower world, and digest its self into, and constantly preserve its self in,  
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this exquisite order in which we see it, and all without the direction or contrivance of a wiser Agent, is beyond all the Legends of the Papists, or (which is all one) all the Fictions of the Poets.

2. The insuperable difficulty of the practice of Religion. There are (say they) so many hard duties to be performed, so many delights to be forsaken, so much time to be employed, such labours, losses and pains to be endured, that it is in vain to attempt it, for we shall never be able to go through it.

1. *Ans.* Supposing the truth of Religion, the greatest difficulties are reasonable, and should be chearfully embrac'd, our very Enemies being Judges. It hath been said by some atheistical persons to careless Christians, did I believe as you do, I should not live as you do. Did I believe there was a God, and a future state of unspeakable pleasure or torment, I should certainly make it my great business to escape the one and secure the other; I should wholly give my self to reading, praying, hearing, and preparation for eternity; I should account no time too much, no pains or hazard too great for so high a concern. The truth is, in this they speak great reason, and it will rise up in judgment against thousands of slothful and negligent Christians, who do indeed believe the truth of these things, and yet are so cold and remiss therein, that grudge to spend a little time, or to deny themselves a little in their ease, or recreation, or worldly occasions, that they may attend the one thing necessary: And whoever thou art that believest these things (*i. e.* that art not

not a foolish Atheist) be for ever ashamed to mention this as an objection.

2. There are as great difficulties in an ungodly life, as there are in the practice of Religion. As there are no pleasures of a sinner but a Saint may enjoy those that are parallel or superiour to them, so there are no difficulties or inconveniences which a Saint meets with in the ways of God, but sinners are frequently exposed to the same, or greater, in the pursuit of a vain world or base lusts. Doth Religion require much of thy time? so doth the world: thou must rise early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness, and all this for trifling vanities, for dreams and shadows, as indeed all worldly things are. Why should it be more troublesom to spend time in attendance upon God, for substantial and eternal blessings, than to spend time in attendance upon earthly Courts and Princes, in expectation of those things which commonly they never obtain; and, if they do, they cannot long enjoy them. Doth Religion command thee to *honour the Lord with thy substance*, and to lay out some part of thy treasure in charitable uses? Doth it sometimes command thee to *suffer the loss of all things*? so doth irreligion too. And if a due estimate were taken of the impressions made upon mens estates by their Religion, and by their lusts; if perhaps it may be said, Religion, like *Saul*, hath slain its thousands, I am sure, it may be said, mens lusts, like *David*, have slain their ten thousands. Is it torment of body and death which Religion sometimes exposeth a man to? and do not the lusts of men betray them to the same inconveniences?

ences? To say nothing of the endless and easeless torments of the other world, (the single consideration whereof must needs, to any prudent man, infinitely outweigh all which this world can offer or give) if we look only to the present life, universal experience shows what havock mens lusts make of their bodies, how they do not only shorten and embitter mens lives, but immaturely and violently snatch them away. How many thousands dye Martyrs to their lusts, and are burnt with as keen a fire (though not so honourable) as that which the Martyrs were fry'd in!

3. Religion is not so difficult as it seems to be: It seems indeed intolerable to strangers that understand it not, but to those that have experience of it, *its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace, Prov. 3. 17.* And which of these two is most credible? Whose testimony shall I take concerning a Country? his that hath only lookt upon it in a Map, and understands nothing but by hearsay? Or his who hath diligently travelled through it, and made an exact survey of it? *My yoke (saith our Saviour) is easie and my burthen is light, Mat. 11. 30.* and St. John attests to the truth of it, *1 Joh. 5. 3. His commandments are not grievous.* 'Tis true, Religion, like the Arts, (and all excellent things) is hard at first, but afterwards use and exercise and the grace of God doth make it easie. The difficulties also of Religion are mixt with great sweetness, and followed with glorious rewards; there is a gracious God to assist, a pure and peaceable conscience to support and delight, certain hope of eternal glory to invite,



invite, whereas the sinners difficulties are quite of another nature, and agravated with fearful circumstances ; oft times outward troubles upon him, and a guilty conscience within him, and an infernal pit opening its mouth to receive him ; he cannot live, yet dare not dye. This is the portion of the enemies of Religion.

3. Differences amongst Professors of Religion. If I would be religious [say some men] there are so many Religions among us, one contradicting and condemning another, that I know not what to believe, nor which to chuse, and therefore its the wisest way to be of no Religion.

1. *Ans.* The differences among Professors of Religion are neither so weighty, nor so many, as is pretended. Ungodly men look upon them with a magnifying Glas ; their hatred of Religion makes them seem worse than in truth they are ; I shall not now meddle with any other Religion but our own. I suppose the vanity and imposture of Popery is sufficiently evident to all intelligible persons, whom lust or interest doth not blind and byass. But as for the differences among Protestants, which Papists and Atheists do so tragically aggravate, if they come to be thoroughly scan'd, the case will be found to be, as sometimes you shall observe in a mist, where a Bird or other Object at a distance will seem very great, which, when you come nearer, dwindles into an inconsiderable bigness. Protestants are all agreed in the vitals and fundamentals of Religion, they have the same Articles of their Creed, the same Rule of Faith, and Life, and Prayer. If mens pride and  
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passions were mortify'd, it is apparent enough from the Confessions of Protestant Churches [which is the only rational Standard to try them by] the differences are more in appearance than in truth, more in words than in things, and generally more in circumstances than in substance; so that a man may as well quarrel with humanity, because one man differs from another in age, stature, quality, &c. as with Religion for the unessential differences of its Professors.

2. Differences among Professors of Religion are an evident argument of the truth of it; and I am perswaded this is one reason why God permits differences amongst Christians in lesser things, that men might be more fully satisfied concerning the truth of those substantial Doctrines wherein all are agreed. Certainly that great variety, levity, and wildness of many mens minds, the vast difference of mens apprehensions, educations, inclinations, affections, and interests (which are the principal causes of diversity of opinion) doth give sufficient assurance to any considerate man of the truth of that Religion, which forceth the unanimous assent of so many persons, and them of such differing complexions. And surely this is a strange and most perverse way of reasoning, because a man is unsatisfied in some lesser matters, wherein Christians differ, to forsake those essential truths wherein all are agreed. 'Tis a sign the man is resolved to be quarrelsome, and that his quarrel is with Religion.

3. Differences in Religion are not so hard, but that a prudent and pious man may find out the truth. If a man diligently and humbly study the Word of God,

God, and heartily beg of God the Spirit of direction, and take advice from able and faithful Ministers whom God hath established in his Church for this end (*Matt. 2. 7. For the Priests lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the Law at his mouth, for he is the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts*) and conscientiously practise what they already know and believe, I dare confidently say, that man shall either understand the right in cases of difference, or else God will pardon his mistake. And indeed this is the right use we should make of differences in Religion, not to throw off all Religion (for a man may upon the very same ground abandon his reason, because of the differences and contradictions in mens reasonings one with another) but to be the more inquisitive into the truth. So did the *Samaritan Convert*; *Joh. 4. 19, 20. Sir, I perceive that thou art a Prophet, our Fathers worshipped in this Mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem men ought to worship.* She doth not infer that therefore she would worship no where, according to the new Logick of atheistical or wanton Wits, but she applies her self to Christ for direction concerning the true Worship.

4. The fewness and meanness, as also the folly and weakness, of true Christians. The great Wits (say they) the profound Philosophers, the deep Statesmen, the men of honour, these contemn Religion, which none but a few obscure Fools embrace. As *Machiavel* is said to have told the Confessor sent to him by the Duke of *Florence*, when he was upon his sick Bed. He dreamt that he was in Heaven, and that there he saw many poor unlearned Monks and

others of mean capacity and quality; and that he had been in Hell, and there saw many great Emperours, renowned Generals, wise Counsellors, and famous Scholars, and added, that he was for the best company, and so dismiss him; and this is really the choice that many others make.

1. *Answ.* You are not surprized herein, it was observed by Christ himself, that *the poor did receive the Gospel*; and the Apostle confirms it by his experience, *1 Cor. I. 6. Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called*: and this was designed by God for wise and weighty ends, partly to teach men contempt of worldly greatness, which they are too apt to admire, to convince men that he is no respecter of persons, that he values no mans Titles; partly to reduce things to a greater equality, *Luke 16. 27. Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst good things, and Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted and thou art tormented.* God will not allow to any man two Heavens, he therefore that hath his Heaven and happiness in this world, may be the better contented if a more despicable person goes away with the happiness of the next world, especially seeing he had his choice, and that which he far preferred before it; partly to demonstrate the truth and divine power of that Religion that could subdue the world by a few, mean, foolish, and contemptible instruments. So that you see this objection confronts the wisdom of God and all his holy designs; as also it strikes at the very person of our blessed Saviour, who came into the world in the same despicable circumstances. which here they object against.

against his followers, not considering that it were very improper that *the Disciple should be above his Master*, and that the followers of so mean a person as our Lord thought fit to appear upon earth, should be the Grandees of the world. The truth is, this objection ariseth from an overweening conceit of worldly greatness, as if God were obliged to as high and honourable an esteem of the great men of the world, as they have of themselves. These men should consider that Religion is not the product of mans Nature, but of Gods free grace; I shall say to them as *Luther did to Melancthon, Orandus est Melancthon ut desinat esse rector mundi; Melancthon is to be entreated to come down from his throne, and to suffer God to govern the world as he pleaseth.* So these Atheistical Objectors are entreated to permit God to dispose of his grace as he thinks fit: If God think fit with *Jacob* to cross his hands and to lay the right hand upon the younger Son, if it please God to bestow his grace upon a poor *Lazarus*, and to neglect the Purple Robe, shall foolish and arrogant men presently commence a suit against God, and quarrel with his providence, and renounce their Religion? Shall they pull God out of the throne, unless he will take them into his Privy Council?

2. The matter of this objection will in a great measure be found false; for it will appear upon enquiry, that truly religious persons both in this and former Ages, have been, and are neither few nor mean. The History of former times assure us of vast multitudes which heartily embraced the Christian Religion, and seal'd to it with their blood; and some have

have made the computation of the Christian Martyrs slain in the first 300 years, that there were 5000 for every day in the year save one; and thanks be to God, there is yet a very considerable number of such, both here and elsewhere in the world, which, however unhappily differenced in lesser things, yet in reason, justice, and charity we ought to believe to be truly religious persons, if we take not our measures from the new models and definitions of Religion, which the fancies or humours of men have coin'd, but content our selves with Apostolical simplicity, and with Saint Peter's description of it, *Acts 10. 35. In every Nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* And as religious men have not been few, so neither have they been mean, either in outward quality, or inward endowments. It were easie to present you with a large Catalogue of great Princes and Emperours, valiant Souldiers, sage Counsellours, men of the greatest Wit and Counsel of their several Ages, who have given their names to Christ, and sacrificed their very lives to Religion; and if this Age be more degenerate than the former, we may thank the Objectors in a great measure for it, who have made it their great business to debauch persons, and to bring all Religion into contempt.

3. Admit there be many weaknesse and follies of divers true Christians, these men, if they had common discretion in them, would consider that Religion doth not pretend to alter the temper of mens brains and bodies, not to make men Philosophers, but virtuous, not to raise their intellectuals, but to mend



mend their morals, not to make them discreet in worldly concerns, but to make them wise unto salvation. Nor do I perswade you to imitate the folly, but the piety, of religious persons; only take heed that those, whom you call fools, do not show themselves wiser than those that account themselves the wise men of the world: though indeed if a true estimate were made of the despisers of Religion, I doubt we should find so many weak Brethren among them, as would give little credit to this objection; and for those that are esteemed the Wits of the Party, I have heard a person of great honour and learning profess, that of all the atheistical Wits which he had the unhappiness to be acquainted with, he knew not one that was a person of solid learning and deep judgment; but this I am sure of, there are not greater follies in *Bedlam* than many of these great Wits are guilty of, they have not so much wit as to preserve their estates from ruine, their bodies and names from rotting while they live. There cannot be devised a greater madness, than for a man to expose himself to such tremendous hazards of the wrath of God and everlasting burnings, and that too for such poor and sordid recompences, many of them purchasing their eternal damnation with their temporal ruine, and marching through one Hell into another. And therefore either let them cure their own follies, or let them be ashamed to upbraid the follies of religious men. And seeing the chief pretences and objections of the Enemies of Religion are so trifling and impertinent, as you see, let us all approve our selves to be the Children of Wisdom in justifying of it, notwithstanding all the miscarriages of its friends or censure of its enemies.